

Day-Edgitt Ranch House
Colorado-Guadalupe Rivers Confluence Area
West of Leaday townsite
Voss Vicinity
Coleman County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3363

HABS
TEX
42-Voss,
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

~~SKETCHES~~

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
DAY-PADGITT RANCH TENANT HOUSE

HABS
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42-VOS.V,
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I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Located .8 miles west of Leaday townsite, .2 miles south of the old Ballinger Road, .5 miles east of the Colorado River, Voss vicinity, Coleman County, State of Texas

USCS Leaday Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 14.434800.3492092

Present Owner: The Day-Padgitt Ranch heirs, Lillian Padgitt Morris, Day Padgitt Kuntz, and Jane Maverick Padgitt Sowell; grant of permanent easement to the Colorado River Municipal Water District in 1987

Present Occupant: Abandoned

Significance: The Day-Padgitt Ranch tenant house is architecturally significant as a building type, the woodframe tenant house type common to the area at the beginning of the twentieth century. The house is culturally significant as one of the first, if not the first, of a large group of tenant houses ordered constructed by local rancher Mabel Doss Day Lea to house prospective homesteaders on small tracts of land she was creating out of the subdivision of her great Day Ranch landholdings. It was designed to house two families, with two distinct and separate living arrangements, an almost unique survival of this type in the vicinity.

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: circa 1904-1906. Basis for dating: the house was one of the first, if not the first, of a great number of tenant houses erected by Mabel Doss Day Lea and her successors on the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller Ranches. Mrs. Lea had begun breaking up the Day Ranch for subdivision into tenant farms in 1904; she died in 1906, and a date range of 1904-1906 is probably correct. This date is also consistent with oral history

information from Mrs. James T. Padgitt, Jr. (Lillian Maverick Padgitt), who lived in the house in the 1930s.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The structure is located on land which was patented to the School Commissioners of Brazoria County in the 1840s and sold by them to William H. Day, in 1878.¹ Day died in 1881 and ownership passed to his widow Mabel Doss Day; following her death in 1906, ownership passed to their daughter Willie Mabel Day Padgitt. The land has passed into the ownership of the great-grandchildren of William and Mabel Day: Lillian Padgitt Morris, Day Padgitt Kuntz, and Jane Maverick Padgitt Sowell. These heirs granted permanent easement to the Colorado River Municipal Water District in 1987.²
3. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located. The designs for a great number of tenant houses erected at this time throughout the Day Ranch lands, and for a number of small houses for the new town of Leaday across Grape Creek from this structure, were no doubt taken from catalogs; these catalogs and other architectural data may survive among the Day-Padgitt papers held by family members in San Antonio or among the Day-Miller Ranch papers, now held in the trusteeship of the Commerce State Bank, Kansas City.
4. Alterations and additions: The house is structurally unaltered. The east and west porches have recent concrete slabs, the east porch with a scratched date: "1962." There is a small modern bathroom addition to the south. There is a modern covering of soft asphalt shingles over the old railroad siding on the west and south faces of the house and on the bathroom addition to the south. Modern corrugated metal sheets cover the old wood shingles of the roof.

B. Historical Context:

For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers please see HABS No. TX-3350.

The Day-Padgitt Ranch tenant house is located on the present-day Day-Padgitt Ranch; it occupies land that had been set aside in the 1840s for the school commissioners of Brazoria County.³ In 1878 ranching entrepreneur William H. Day purchased from the

Brazoria commissioners a very large tract, as well as several thousand acres to the east which had been part of the Fort Bend County School Lands.⁴ In 1879 he married Mabel Doss, and together they began the operation of the new Day Ranch. Following Day's death in 1881, Mabel Doss Day was left with their infant child, Willie Mabel Day, and debts in excess of one hundred thousand dollars. Her efforts to clear the debt and to operate the ranch in a cost-effective manner gained her a high reputation in the area. She remarried in 1889, to Captain J. C. Lea of Roswell, New Mexico, and moved to the Pecos Valley to join her new husband in his ranching and land-development endeavors there. At Lea's death in 1904 Mabel Doss Day Lea returned to the Day Ranch and began plans for the subdivision of the ranch lands into tenant farms. Advertisements were placed to attract homesteaders; in 1904 a new town, named "Leaday" in honor of her two husbands, was laid out at a site on the ranch near the old Trap Crossing on the Colorado River; numerous tenant houses were constructed; a new Day Ranch headquarters house was begun. (For a more comprehensive history of the Day Ranch and vicinity and biographical information on William and Mabel Day see HABS No. TX-3351: Mabel Doss Day Lea House and HABS No. TX-3362: Leaday Townsite.)

Mabel Doss Day Lea died in April, 1906, at the moment when these elaborate planning and building projects had just begun on sites scattered throughout her thousands of acres of ranch land. Her heir was her daughter Willie Mabel Day, then Mrs. Tom Padgitt. Because of the debts attached to the property the Padgitts were obliged to sell a great portion of the Day Ranch to the Miller banking family of Belton. The Millers followed the policy established by Mabel Day Lea of subdividing their property, which was now called the Day-Miller Ranch; and the Padgitts likewise continued the subdivision of their remaining holdings, which were now called the Day-Padgitt Ranch. Thus in the period 1906-1930s the Padgitts and Millers changed the face of their portion of the Coleman County countryside. Dozens of tenant houses continued to be constructed, the staked-out site at Leaday grew into a bustling little cross-roads town; new schools and churches were constructed; gins and silos were provided for a growing tenant population.

During this activity in the brief period before her death, it is presumed that Mabel Day Lea continued to occupy the old stone Day Ranch headquarters house located a short distance to the northwest of the Day-Padgitt Ranch Tenant House. The Day-

Padgitt tenant house was one of the first tenant structures ordered constructed by Mabel Day Lea. Mrs. Lea's daughter and heir, Willie Day Padgitt, had various improvements made on the site in the early twentieth century, including the construction of a concrete storm cellar west of the house. Willie Day Padgitt's son, James Padgitt, began his married life in the house in the period following World War II.⁵ The house functioned mainly as shelter for a long succession of tenants who were working farms in the area.

Eventually, most of the new homesteaders and their successors occupying the tenant houses on the Padgitt and Miller ranches found it too difficult to practice subsistence farming on land that was more suited to ranching. The failure of cotton markets and the impact of the Depression disintegrated the tenancy policy. Those remaining in the Leaday vicinity turned increasingly to livestock production. Gradually the tenant houses were abandoned, becoming elements in an almost extinct agricultural landscape. Many of the structures were dismantled and the materials sold off. The land was eventually repossessed and reintegrated into the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller Ranches. By the mid-1950s a configuration of land use and property ownership was resumed comparable to the period when William Day first began to fence the open range.⁶

The Day-Padgitt tenant house site returned to the proprietorship of the Padgitts and was maintained intact probably because it was somewhat better-built than the other tenant structures in the vicinity. It remained in the Padgitts' possession until 1987 when permanent easement was granted to the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Lillian Padgitt Morris, Day Padgitt Kuntz, and Jane Maverick Padgitt Sowell, the great-grandchildren of William and Mabel Doss Day. The house is presently abandoned.

In 1979 the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981 a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently a number of other studies and

amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988 an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project: the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres, and the threat of inundation of the Day-Padgitt tenant house is possible in the near future.

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The small woodframed one-and-one-half-story tenant house was part of a group of dozens of tenant houses constructed in the immediate vicinity in the period from 1904 to the outbreak of World War I. It is in many ways typical of its period and place, but somewhat better-constructed than its counterparts and with a plan configuration to accommodate two tenant families which was not common among the other tenant houses on the Day-Padgitt and Day-Miller ranches.
2. Condition of fabric: The house has been well-maintained until quite recent years, but is presently abandoned and rapidly deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The one-and-one-half-story house is rectangular in form, approximately 28 feet across the east front and 30 feet deep, with an 8-foot-wide east porch which extends across the entire length of this elevation⁷. The south bathroom addition is approximately 9 feet by 12 feet.

2. Foundations: The house is set on small brick piers with a later skirting of cement mortar on wire mesh.
3. Wall construction: The light-weight woodframed construction was covered with railroad siding which is still in place; in addition, a covering of modern soft asphalt shingles has been applied over the old siding on the west and south faces of the house and on the south bathroom addition.
4. Porches: The shed roof of the long east porch is supported by four square wood posts; the old flooring system has been removed and replaced by a modern concrete slab. There is a modern concrete slab at the west kitchen door, but no porch, although a porch may have existed at this point in the original construction.
5. Chimneys: Twin brick chimneystacks serving stove flues rise from the center of the gable roof; they are cement-plastered and rise approximately two feet above the ridge.
6. Openings: Most of the original windows are still in place. They are wood sashes of the 4-over-4 pane pattern with smaller openings in the same proportion and same pane pattern in the gable ends of the half story above. The windows of the shed space along the west face of the house and the south bathroom addition are small wood sashes, but not original.
7. Roof: The roof is a simple gabled one with a long shed roof extending to cover the west rooms and a separate low-pitched shed roof to cover the long east porch. A recent corrugated metal roofing covers the old wood shingles still in place.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: There are two almost square rooms butted together to form the east front of the house. To their rear, and extending the full length of the house, is a narrow shed room; from the east wall of this shed room, and approximately in its center, rises a steep flight of stairs. A small bathroom addition was added to butt to the south wall of the house; it communicates with the shed room and with the north square room. The two main or east rooms have doors to the east porch; they were originally fitted with stoves and probably each functioned as the principal living and sleeping room for two separate families, with the long shed room to their rear serving both families as workspace and as access to the half-floor above.
- b. Second floor: In the half-story the steep stairs rise to a tiny landing which serves two low rooms under the gable, these rooms corresponding to the square east rooms below, and serving as additional sleeping rooms for the two families. The brick stove stacks rise through an end of the north bedroom.

2. Flooring, wall and ceiling finish, heating: The floors are 1-inch by 4-inch tongue-and-grooved boards. The ceilings of the first floor east rooms are beaded-board; the wall sheathing in these rooms is boarding, laid horizontally and occasionally vertically, and hung with wallpaper. There are no decorative features in the interior of this simple tenant house. Apparently only the two main first floor rooms contained stoves as the only heating and cooking sources in the house.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house faces east toward Grape Creek and the townsite of Leaday. It is situated on a low rise which slopes gently to the east and the creekbed. The present-day approach road is from the north a short distance from the old Ballinger Road.

2. Outbuildings: Approximately 25 feet west of the house is a cast-in-place concrete storm cellar, 10 feet wide by 15 feet long. According to Day-Padgitt family tradition, the cellar was built by Willie Day Padgitt in the early 1900s and predates the occupation by Mr. and Mrs. James T. Padgitt, Jr. in the 1930s.⁷

Prepared by:
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September 1989

IV. ENDNOTES

1. Reference is to Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Record vol. B, 572 and 573.
2. Ibid., Deed Record vol. 601, 164.
3. For a more complete discussion of the Brazoria and Fort Bend counties' school lands, see HABS No. TX-3350.
4. For a fuller discussion of the activities of William and Mabel Doss Day and various sources of information for the Days, Padgitts, and Millers, see HABS No. TX-3351.
5. Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir: Concho, Coleman and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II: Historical Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado river Municipal Water District by Espey, Huston, and Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental Consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 8-15 and 9-42.
6. See James Padgitt's essay, "Ranching in Coleman County," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People, vol. I, (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), 44-48.
7. Interview with Mrs. James T. (Lillian Maverick) Padgitt, Jr., Leaday, Texas, 4 January 1990; interview by Amy Earls on site.

8. A photocopy of a 1989 photograph showing the porch and taken by the architectural field crew under the direction of Gus Hamblett and Graham Luhn is attached.

V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Sketch plan of site

VI. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the direction of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A.I.A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.



